

Meeting Summary

Salmon Recovery Funding Board Issues Task Force

October 16, 2003 7:00 p.m. – 10:15 p.m. and October 17, 2003, 9:00 a.m. – 5:15 pm
Edmonds, WA

Members Present

Steve Tharinger, Chair; Shirley Solomon; Craig Partridge; Julie Dagnon; Doug St. John; Laura Johnson; Steve Leider; Jim Kramer; Steve Martin; Tim Smith; Tom Laurie; Jim Fox.

Also present: Brian Walsh, Rollie Geppert, and Kristi Silver.

Summary of ITF Recommendations to the SRFB

- Adopt the *Guide to Lead Entity Strategy Development* as revised by the ITF on October 16
- Maintain the current SRFB acquisition policy
- For allocating funding across lead entity project lists, shift from an approach based on evaluation of individual projects to one based on evaluation of lead entity strategies and portfolios.
- Set a “cap” on the amount of a SRFB grant
- Establish a Review Panel to evaluate strategies and portfolios; the Panel would be composed of technical and nontechnical members
- Establish Technical Teams to ensure that every project funded by the Board is technically sound
- All other things being equal, project lists from lead entities with multiple WRIAs, multiple listed species, and operating at the scale of Salmon Recovery Regions should receive more funding

Lead Entity Strategies

The meeting opened with discussion regarding the draft document *Guide to Lead Entity Strategy Development*.

The ITF reached the following conclusions regarding the content and use of this document:

- The elements in the three boxes in Attachment I should be expressed as questions. ITF recommends that the Review Panel seek answers to these questions during the strategy review process. Lead entities would not be required to revise their strategies, but they would need to be prepared to answer as many of these questions as they are able to.

- The ITF recommends that the remainder of Guide be advisory rather than prescriptive.

Staff will revise the draft *Guide* based on changes made by the ITF and present it to the SRFB for approval at the October 29 meeting.

Acquisition Policy

The ITF reviewed the SRFB's policy on funding acquisition projects. Currently statutes and SRFB policy emphasize protection of intact and functional habitat as a SRFB priority. However, the SRFB has left it up to each lead entity to decide whether to give priority to protection or restoration projects. The ITF recommends that the SRFB not change its policy on acquisition. However, the ITF recommends that the SRFB urge lead entities be responsive to community interests regarding public land acquisition. Lead entities may choose not to submit acquisition projects for funding, or may choose only to submit acquisition projects where the sponsor will continue to pay property taxes and will provide adequate stewardship of the land.

Allocation of SRFB Funds Across Lead Entity Lists

In the past, the SRFB has used the Technical Panel's ratings of the *benefits* and *certainty* of proposed projects to help decide how much funding to apply to each lead entity list. After lengthy discussion, the ITF decided to recommend a shift from making funding decisions based on the evaluation of individual projects to the evaluation of each lead entity strategy and the overall portfolio (i.e., list of projects) as long as there is a mechanism to ensure that every project that is funded by the Board is technically sound.

- ▷ Lead entities would evaluate and rank their projects using the definitions of *benefits* and *certainty* adopted by the SRFB
- ▷ There would continue to be a technical review of individual projects to ensure that every project that is funded by the Board is technically sound.
- ▷ Projects would be reviewed before they are submitted to the SRFB. The technical reviewers would work with lead entity TAGs and project applicants to resolve differences of opinion and correct deficiencies. In their report to the SRFB, technical reviewers would note any projects with low benefits or low certainty that they believe cannot be adequately improved.
- ▷ The SRFB Review Panel would review strategies early in the grant cycle and provide feedback to the lead entities. The review will be based on the answers to the questions listed in the *Guide to Lead Entity Strategy Development*.
- ▷ After project lists are submitted to the SRFB, the Review Panel would evaluate each lead entity's portfolio of projects as a whole, not project by project. The Review Panel would evaluate the overall quality of each lead

entity list and how well the list addresses the priorities identified in the lead entity's strategy.

- ▷ The SRFB would use the technical review of projects to decide whether to remove a project from consideration. The Board would use the Review Panel's evaluation of the strategy and the portfolio to decide how much funding to allocate to each lead entity list
- ▷ Funding priority will be given to lists from lead entities that have a greater number of WRIAs and listed species, and those that operate at the scale of Salmon Recovery Regions. At the next ITF meeting, additional factors for determining funding priorities will be discussed.

The ITF also discussed the possibility of imposing "caps" on the size of grant awards. Restoration and acquisition projects are becoming increasingly more complicated and expensive, and funding available for SRFB grants seems to be diminishing. With more and more projects receiving a million dollars or more of SRFB funding, it is becoming harder to make an equitable and fair distribution of funds across lead entities. The ITF recommended that the SRFB place a limit ("cap") on SRFB grants. The ITF was undecided whether this cap should be \$500,000 or \$750,000. Phasing of expensive projects was also discussed. The ITF also recommended that "combination" projects be capped at a higher level because they contain both an acquisition and restoration components.

Role of the Technical or Review Panel

The ITF recommends that there be a core Review Panel composed of technical and non-technical members. The technical members would be experts in salmon recovery with a broad range of knowledge, an understanding of watershed processes and an ecosystem approach to habitat restoration and protection, and an understanding of strategic planning. Non-technical members would have experience in bridging the gap between science and policy, and inclusion of the community and stakeholder interests in policy development and decision-making. This Review Panel would be responsible for evaluation of lead entity strategies and project portfolios.

The Review Panel would employ Technical Teams to undertake the technical review of proposed projects to ensure that they are scientifically sound. There would be several teams with expertise in different areas of habitat restoration and protection.

Effectiveness Monitoring

The ITF briefly discussed the effectiveness monitoring and status and trend monitoring proposal that will be presented to the SRFB at the October 29-30 meeting. Currently the Board requires projects to have a monitoring plan and allows up to 20% of a grant to be used for monitoring for up to five years. The proposal to the Board is to eliminate monitoring as an eligible expense for all SRFB-funded projects. Instead, a random sample of SRFB-funded projects would be selected from different project categories for effectiveness monitoring

using standard protocols that have been developed for each project type. Funding would be available for monitoring these projects—either for the project sponsor to conduct the specified monitoring, or for an agency or consultant to do so. The experimental design will allow statistically rigorous conclusions to be drawn concerning the effectiveness of different types of projects. This, and the proposed status and trend monitoring will complement the Board's prior investment in Intensively Monitored Watersheds.

Next ITF Meeting:

November 18th (evening) and November 19th in the SeaTac area, location to be announced. Topics will include: Criteria for prioritizing lead entity areas; criteria for evaluating lead entity strategies and portfolios; process for evaluating and funding marine nearshore projects; definitions of benefits and certainty; and eligibility of certain project types.